OR THE MYSTERIOUS MURDER OF THE PRINCE PADEMA.

A new volume of short stories by Robert Barr, under the stirring title "Revenge," is published by the Frederick A. Stokes Company. There are twenty stories in the book, and every one of them depends for its interest on the most terrible human passion, with the utmost ingenuity of plot, the novelty of situation and swift and picturesque style. One of these condensed tragedies is here given by permission of the publishers.

"She sank fainting in her chair as she let go the rope, and clapped her hands to her ears."

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PRINCE PADEMA sat desolately on his lofty balcony at Florence and cursed things generally. Fate had indeed dealt hardly with the young man.

The Prince had been misled by the apparent reasonableness of the adage that if you want a thing well done you should do it yourself. In committing a murder it is always advisable to have some one else to do it for you, but the Prince's plans had been several times interfered with by the carelessness or inefficiency of his emissaries, so on one unfortunate occasion he had determined to remove an objectionable man with his own hand, and realized then how easily mistakes may occur.

He had met the man face to face under a corner lamp in Venice. The recognition was mutual, and the man, fearing his noble enemy, had fled. The Prince pursued, and the man apparently tried to double upon him, and, with his cloak over his face, endeavored to sneak past along the dark wall. The Prince deftly ran the dagger into his vitals. His Highness was appalled to see that he had assassinated a scion of one of the noblest families of Venice, which was very different from murdering a man of low degree, whose life the law took little note of.

So the Prince had to flee from Venice, and he took up his residence in a narrow street in an obscure part of Florence.

On this particular evening the Prince's sombre meditations were interrupted by a song. The song apparently came from the street in which his suite of rooms were situated, and from an open window some distance below him. What caught his attention was the fact that the song was Venetian, and the voice that sang it was the rich, mellow voice of Venice.

There were other exiles, then, besides himself. He peered over the edge of the balcony perched like an eagle's nest high above the narrow stone street, and endeavored to locate the open window from which the song came, or, better still, to catch a glimpse of the singer.

For a time he was unsuccessful, but at last his patience was rewarded. On a balcony to the right and some distance below his own there appeared the most beautiful girl even he had ever seen. The dark, oval face was so distinctly Venetian that he almost persuaded himself he had met her in his native town.

"Pietro," he whispered softly through his own open windows to the servant who was moving silently about the room, "come here for a moment, quietly." The servant came stealthily to the edge of the window. "You see that girl on the lower balcony," said the Prince, in a whisper. Pietro nodded. "Find out for me who she is—why she is here—whether she has any friends. Do it silently, so as to arouse no suspicion." Again the faithful servant nodded and disappeared into the gloom of the room.

Next day Pietro brought to his eager master what information he had been able to glean. He had succeeded in forming the acquaintance of the Signorina's maid.

For some reason, which the maid either did not know or would not disclose, the Signorina was exiled for a time from Venice. She belonged to a good family there, but the name of the family the maid refused to divulge. They had been in Florence for several weeks, but had only taken the rooms below within the last two days. The Signorina received absolutely no one, and the maid had been cautioned to say nothing whatever about her to any person; but she had apparently succumbed in a measure to the blandishments of gallant Pietro.

That evening the Prince was again upon his balcony, but his thoughts were not so bitter as they had been the day before. He had a bouquet of beautiful flowers beside him.

"You may go now, Pepita," said the girl. The maid threw a lace shawl over the shoulders of her mistress and departed. The Prince leaned over the balcony and whispered: "Signorina." The startled girl looked up and down the street, and then at the balcony, which stood out against the opalescent sky, the tracery of ironwork showing like delicate etching on the luminous background. She flushed and dropped her eyes, making no reply. "Signorina," repeated the Prince, "I, too, am an exile.

Pardon me. It is in remembrance of our lovely city," and with that he lightly flung the bouquet, which fell at her feet on the floor of the balcony. For a few moments the girl did not move or raise her eyes. Then she cast a quick glance through the open window into her room. After some slight hesitation she stooped gracefully and picked up the bouquet. "Ah, beautiful Venice!" she murmured with a sigh, still not looking upward. The Prince was delighted with the success of his first advance, which is always the difficult step. Evening after evening they sat there later and later. The acquaintance ripened to its inevitable conclusion—the conclusion the Prince had counted on from the first.

One evening she stood in the darkness with her cheek pressed against the wall at the corner of her balcony nearest to him; he looked over and downward at her. "It cannot be. It cannot be," she said, with a quaver in her voice, but a quaver which the Prince recognized, with his large experience, as the tone of yielding. "It must be," he whispered down to her. "It was ordained from the first. It has to be." The girl was weeping silently. "It is impossible," she said at last. "My servant sleeps outside my door. Even if she did not know, your servant would, and there would be gossip—and scandal. It is impossible." "Nothing is impossible," cried the Prince, eagerly, "where true love exists. I shall lock my door, and Pietro shall know nothing about it. He never comes unless I call him. I will get a rope and throw it to your balcony. Lock your door as I do mine. In the darkness nothing is seen." "No, no," she murmured. "That would not do. You could not climb back again, and all would be lost."

"Oh, nonsense!" cried the young man, eagerly. "It is nothing to climb back." He was about to add that he had done it frequently before, but he checked himself in time.

For a moment she was silent. Then she said: "I cannot risk your getting back. It must be certain. If you get a rope—a strong rope—and put a loop in it for your foot, and pass the other end of the rope to me around the stanchest railing of your balcony, I will let you down to the level of my own. Then you can easily swing yourself within reach. If you find you cannot climb back I can help you by pulling on the rope, and you will ascend as you come down."

The Prince laughed lightly, "Do you think," he said, "that your frail hands are stronger than mine?" "Four hands," she replied, "are stronger than two. Besides, I am not so weak as, perhaps, you think." "Very well," he replied, not in a mood to cavil about trivialities. "When shall it be—to-night?" "No; to-morrow night. You must get your rope to-morrow." Again the Prince laughed quietly. "I have the rope in my room now," he answered. "You were very sure," she said, softly. "No; not sure. I was strong in hope. Is your door locked?" "Yes," she replied in an agitated whisper. "But it is still early. Wait an hour or two." "Ah!" cried the Prince, "it will never be darker than at this moment, and I think, my darling, how long I have waited!" There was no reply. "Stand inside the window," whispered the Prince. As she did so a coil of rope fell on the balcony. "Have you got it?" he asked. "Yes," was the scarcely audible reply. "Then don't trust to your own strength. Give it a turn around the balcony rail." "I have done so," she whispered.

Although he could not see her because of the darkness, she saw him silhouetted against the light sky.

Holding the end of the rope tightly, the girl let it out inch by inch. "That is enough," the Prince said at last; and she held him where he was, leaning over the balcony toward him. "Prince Padema," she said to him. "Ah!" cried the man with a start. "How did you learn my name?" "I have long known it. It is a name of sorrow to our family. Prince," she continued, "have you never seen anything in my face that brought recollection to you? Or, is your memory so short that the grief you bring to others leaves no trace on your own mind?" "God!" cried the Prince in alarm, seizing the rope above him, as if to climb back. "What do you mean?" The girl loosened the rope for an inch or two, and the Prince was lowered with a sickening feeling in his heart, as he realized his position, a hundred feet above the stone street. "I can see you plainly," said the girl in hard and husky tones. "If you make an attempt to climb to your balcony, I will at once loosen the rope. Is it possible you have not suspected who I am and why I am here?"

A sharp memory pierced his brain.

"Meela is dead!" he cried, with a gasp in his breath. "She was drowned. You are flesh and blood. Tell me, you are not her spirit?"

"I cannot tell you that," answered the girl. "My own spirit seemed to leave me when the body of my sister was brought from the canal at the foot of our garden. You know the place well; you know the gate and the steps. I think her spirit then took the place of my own. Ever since that day I have lived only for revenge; and now, Prince Padema, the hour I have waited for is come."

An agonizing cry for help rang through the silent street, but there was no answer to the call.

"I will marry you," he said, "if you will let me reach my balcony again. I will, upon my honor. You shall be a princess."

She laughed lightly. "We Venetians never forget or forgive. Prince Padema, good-by."

She sunk fainting in her chair as she let go the rope, and clapped her hands to her ears, so that no sound came up from the stone street below. When she staggered into her room, all was silence.

THE ORIGINAL "MR. ISAACS."

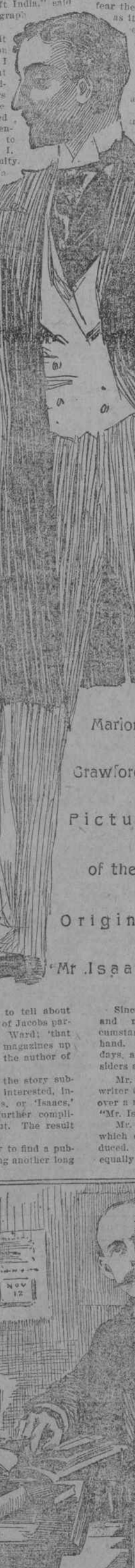
Marion Crawford at Last Tells the True Story of This Fascinating Oriental, Who Was the Chief Figure in His Famous Indian Romance and Who Has Just Been Prohibited by the English Government from Putting Through Any More of His Gigantic Deals in Diamonds.

"THE stand taken by the Indian Government since the Hyderabad diamond case has made it impossible for Mr. Jacobs, the diamond and curiosity merchant of Simla, to do business any longer with the maharajahs of native States. A famous collection is therefore about to be dispersed, and the original of "Mr. Isaacs" will no longer carry on business at the old stand. A gentleman who was recently shown Mr. Jacobs's private apartments states that the description contained in Mr. Crawford's book still fits the drawing room exactly."

Probably no book by an American writer has achieved a more world-wide and permanent success than Mr. F. Marion Crawford's "Mr. Isaacs." Though it appeared fourteen years ago, the publishers say it still has a large and steady sale. The story of how he came to write his first famous novel and of his acquaintance with the original of "Mr. Isaacs," as told in his own words, is of surpassing interest.

"I haven't heard much about 'Mr. Isaacs'—or Jacobs, as they call him in real life—except now and then in the way of stray items like this, since I left India," said Mr. Crawford to a Sunday Journal reporter, after reading the paragraph quoted above, which was clipped from a London paper.

"My first meeting with Mr. Jacobs occurred just as I have told it in my book. The first chapter of 'Mr. Isaacs,' as I will explain to you a little later, tells the incidents almost exactly as they happened. I was in charge of the Allahabad Indian Herald at the time, and that meant that I was reporter, managing editor, editorial writer, correspondence editor and some other things, which kept me busy sixteen hours a day, which was especially trying in the steaming atmosphere of the rainy season. Some trouble came up one day about what are called the 'press telegrams'—the Government in India exercised a sort of censorship over the press, and gave out a certain amount of information to the papers each day—and so Sinnett, the editor of the Pioneer, and I, went up to Simla to try and straighten out the difficulty.



It was at Simla that I became acquainted with Jacobs. I don't know this day Jacob's exact nationality, though I fancy he was a Persian by birth. He spoke absolutely perfect English, without the slightest accent and wore European clothes. You might think from his name that he was a Jew, but that was not the case; 'ben Yakoob,' 'ben Isaac,' and the like are common names among the Mahomedans. Jacob, as he was called was one of the most devout and learned Mahomedans that I have ever seen. His hours of leisure were invariably spent in reading the Koran. His personal description in the first chapter of 'Mr. Isaacs' is, in the main, correct, as I pictured him. The story of his life, too, excepting perhaps that part of it about his being sold as a slave, is exactly as he related it to me. I did not exaggerate at all about his rooms—I could not have done so if I had tried."

Here is Mr. Crawford's word-picture of the original "Mr. Isaacs":

"Isaacs was a man of more than medium stature, though he would never be spoken of as tall. * * * The perfect harmony of all the parts, the even symmetry of every muscle, the equal distribution of a strength not colossal and overwhelming, but ever ready for action, the natural courtesy of gesture, all told of a body in which true proportion of every limb and sinew were at once the main feature and the pervading characteristic. * * * A long, oval face of a wondrous transparent olive tint, and of a decidedly Oriental type. A prominent brow and arched but delicate eyebrows, fitly surmounted a nose smoothly aquiline, but with the broad, well-set nostrils that bespeak active courage. His mouth, often smiling never laughed, and the lips, though closely meeting, were not thin and writhing and cunning, as one so often sees in Eastern faces but rather inclined to a generous Greek fulness, the curling line ever ready to express a sympathy or a scorn which the commanding features above seemed to control and curb.

"I have spoken of his graceful figure and perfect Iranian features, but I hardly noticed either at our first meeting. I was enthralled and fascinated by his eyes. I once saw in France a jewel composed of six precious stones, each a gem of great value, so set that they appeared to form but one solid mass, yielding a strange radiance that changed its hue at every movement, and multiplied the sunlight a thousand fold. Were I to seek a comparison for my friend's eyes, I might find an imperfect one in this masterpiece of the jeweller's art. They were dark and of remarkable size when half closed they were long and almond-shaped; when suddenly opened in anger or surprise, they had the roundness and bold keenness of the eagle's sight." * * *

Just here it will be of interest to the reader to quote from "Mr. Isaacs" the paragraph describing his apartment in the Simla hotel, which, it is said, is soon to be dismantled.

"In the first glance it appeared as if the walls and ceiling were lined with gold and precious stones; and in reality it was almost literally the truth. The apartment, I soon saw, was small—for India, at least—and every available space, nook and cranny, were filled with gold and jewelled ornaments, shining weapons, or uncouth but resplendent idols. There were sabres in scabbards set from end to end with diamonds and sapphires, with cross-hilts of rubies in massive gold mounting, the spoil of some worsted rajah or nawab of the mutiny. There were narghyles four feet high, crusted with gems and curiously wrought work from Bagdad or Herat; water flasks of gold and drinking cups of jade; yataghans from Roum and idols from the far East. Gorgeous lamps of the octagonal Oriental shape hung from the ceiling, and, fed by aromatic oils, shed their soothing light on all around. The floor was covered with a rich, soft pile, and low divans were heaped with cushions of deep-tinted silk and gold."

"In May, 1882," continued Mr. Crawford, "I dined one evening with Sam Ward—he's dead now, poor fellow—and afterward, while we sat smoking and chatting, looking out across Madison square—we were at the New York Club, which was then where the Journal's uptown office now is—I happened to tell about some of the experiences I had had in India, and of the life at Simla, and of Jacobs particularly, and his remarkable career. 'Why not write that out?' said Ward; 'that would make a splendid story.' I had been writing for newspapers and magazines up to that time, and had never had the remotest idea that I would ever be the author of a book.

"Well, I set to work that night and wrote the first chapter, telling the story substantially as it happened. Then, having tasted blood, I became more interested, invented more characters, the English girl and her father, made Jacobs, or 'Isaacs,' rather, fall in love with her, and put in the mysterious Buddhist to further complicate matters, and kept on writing just to see how it would all turn out. The result was that in a little while I had 'copy' enough to fill a book.

"When it was finished I handed it to Ward and he said he would try to find a publisher for it. I heard nothing of it for some time, and had begun writing another long story, simply for my own amusement, when 'Isaacs' was accepted and published by Macmillan & Co. I was surprised at that, and still more so by the success it had. And so I've been at it ever since.

"'Mr. Isaacs' is one of the characters that I have drawn from real life without taking him from the environment in which I found him, which is probably the reason why Jacobs was so quickly identified as being his original. As a general thing, however, I place amid entirely different surroundings the characters that I find interesting enough to take from life. Seen against an unfamiliar background, even their originals would find it difficult to recognize them. The character, indeed, oftener suggests the story first than the situation or combination of circumstances. But in 'The Tale of a Lonely Parish,' and in 'Marzio's Crucifix,' the reverse of this was true. The former novel I had to write at short notice, in order to keep a promise to my publishers, and the little village of Hatfield, where I lived when a boy, suggested itself as a fitting background.

"But I almost forgot to tell you what little I know about this Hyderabad diamond case that this clipping speaks of. As near as I remember the details, the ruler of Hyderabad, which is one of the native States, had a wonderful diamond, and, being in want of some money, intimated that he was willing to dispose of it, placing the price at something like 200,000 pounds, or about a million dollars. A syndicate was formed, with Jacobs at the head, to make the purchase. Now each of these native States in India has a British Resident stationed at the capital, whose duty it is to see that the Prince or maharajah behaves himself. The Resident stands over the maharajah all the time with a big, thick stick, figuratively speaking.

"Now this transaction with Jacobs was naturally kept as quiet as possible for fear the Resident would hear of it, because if he did there would surely be no trade, as it is safe to say that the British Government or the province itself would never see a dollar of the money expended for their own benefit—the maharajah would convert it entirely to his own use. Well, the syndicate paid the Hyderabad maharajah something like $150,000 on account and secured possession of the diamond before the British Resident heard anything about it. The result was that, as Jacobs refused to return the diamond and the maharajah had spent the money, they have been fighting about it ever since, with the conclusion, apparently, that Jacobs will have to retire from business."

The conversation then turned upon some of Mr. Crawford's other works, and the reporter spoke admiringly of the marvellous rapidity with which he turned out book after book; yet all of an equally high standard of excellence.

"Do you think so?" responded Mr. Crawford, with a frank smile. "I don't think I write as good books as I used to. You think 'Casa Braccbio' especially fine and dramatic? I am glad you liked it. I took that story from real life, too. It all happened down in one of the South American republics. A Spanish lady who had an intimate knowledge of the whole affair told my wife the story."

Speaking of novel writing in general, and probably having in his mind his own first success, "Mr. Isaacs," Mr. Crawford said: "If you have a good story to tell and are interested in it, you will find that it will almost write itself. And when it is finished it will make its own terms with the publishers and get printed."

There are few more engaging personalities than Mr. Crawford's. He is tall, has a fine athletic figure—which has not yet begun to "pay its debt to time in pounds of flesh"—and a strong face. His aquiline nose and heavy lower jaw give ample evidence of the enormous will power and perseverance which have kept him steadily at work, year after year, despite successes which would make most men content to rest on their laurels and enjoy their royalties at leisure. He is an ideal citizen of the world. In every clime that he has lived he seems to have lost something of his American characteristics, and to have unconsciously absorbed from every people some touch of their own.

This is especially noticeable in his speech. Its vowels and consonants are less harsh than those of the born New Yorker. At times there is an accent or an inflection that reminds you of London, and again there will be a soft, rolling vowel that has a flavor of the Latin tongues. One is sure at first that there is some unfamiliar accent or inflection, but is at a loss to tell exactly where the strangeness lies. But this is easily accounted for when it is remembered that Mr. Crawford was born in Rome (where, with a brief intermission, he spent his childhood), studied in America, then at Trinity College, Cambridge; then at Karlsruhe and Heidelberg, and that he has since travelled over a good portion of the globe, and has acquired a fluent knowledge of many languages, living and dead. His contact with men and cities has given him wisdom and insight into human character far greater than most men ever achieve. He was forty-two last August, and is now just reaching the maturity of his powers, and there is every reason for believing that, though he has written many wonderful books, he will yet write others which shall surpass them.

Mr. Crawford's home is in Sorrento, Italy, and he visits New York but seldom of late years. His workshop, just at present, is a large room facing Fifth avenue, on the top floor of Macmillan & Co.'s publishing house, between Twelfth and Thirteenth streets. It is as scantily furnished and as bare as can well be imagined. Within a dozen feet of the windows a long, plain table, destitute of any covering, stretches three-quarters of the width of the room. There are half a dozen cheap cane-bottom chairs and two rockers of the same variety. The floor is of slate, without rugs or carpeting of any sort.

In the back part of the room is a long and very broad couch, and there is no break in the monotony of the bare, kalsomined walls except where, near the table, hangs a little book shelf, with a few old magazines, and crossed beside it a fencer's foil. It is, in fact, one of the two kinds of a workroom which anybody knowing Mr. Crawford would imagine he would be likely to have. The other kind would be the ideal one, with book-covered walls, soft carpets and other luxuries that writers in poverty dream about. Mr. Crawford's "shop" at Macmillan's is bare enough to be the ideal abode of any genius. But when a man writes as many thousand words a day as Mr. Crawford must, he is too busy to notice his surroundings.

Since 1882 Mr. Crawford has written about thirty novels, besides many stories and magazine articles. He says he dictated one novel under stress of circumstances, but is not likely to do so again, preferring to write them out himself by hand. One of his books, "The Tale of a Lonely Parish," he wrote in twenty-four days, at the rate of about five thousand words a day. Five thousand words he considers a fair day's work.

Mr. Brett, the manager of Macmillan & Co., Mr. Crawford's publishers, told the writer that the total sales of Mr. Crawford's books up to the present time had reached over a million copies, and that there was a steady demand for all of them, from "Mr. Isaacs," the first, down to the latest one bearing the date of 1896.

Mr. Crawford is a tireless worker and heartily in love with his profession, a fact which doubtless accounts for the very large number of novels which he has produced. In fact, it is doubtful if there is another novelist of the first rank who is equally prolific in stories that have the element of great human interest.

Though Mr. Crawford works very rapidly after he has settled upon the details of his stories, he does not begin to write until he has methodically planned out every important move which his characters are to make. How long the book shall be is the first question; then the number of chapters. If it is to be in three volumes, which is the way such works are generally published in England, he will divide it into twenty-four chapters, eight for each volume. Then he carefully plans out his "scenario," as a playwright would for a three-act drama, choosing just where he can place with the best effect his most telling situations. Here and there in blank space that intervene are words or phrases which are his cues for the introduction of such incidents or speeches as will lead up with ever heightening interest to the climaxes.

Marion Crawford at Work on a New York Society Novel Up in the Lofts of His Publishing House.